

# Daily News Journal

## Spotlight: Police agencies pick up surplus military supplies

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A growing number of law enforcement agencies are taking advantage of a program that gives them free surplus military equipment left over from U.S. military campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Department of Defense's 1033 program, which Congress passed in 1997 to expand on a 1991 initiative, initially aimed to give surplus military equipment for police use in counter-narcotic and counter-terrorism situations.

Now, with the government giving away thousands of Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles, weapons and more pedestrian items such as cars and clothing, even smaller police departments in cities and towns with low crime rates are acquiring items.

Documents from the Defense Logistics Agency's Law Enforcement Support Office show the number of agencies requesting equipment has steadily increased since 2009. Although there was a slight dip from 2012 to 2013, year-to-date totals were on pace to increase again for 2014.

Although the departments don't pay for the materials, they pay for shipment to their location and potential storage and maintenance, agency spokeswoman Michelle McCaskill said.

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Bill Johnson, the executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations, said although his agency doesn't maintain statistics, small to mid-size departments appear to make more requests because their larger counterparts already have the necessary materials.

"It's their turn to get some of this equipment," he said. "They have the opportunity to do so now."

Although most agencies are happy to receive items at little to no cost, some are concerned the program "blurs" the lines between police and military.

The eight-person department in Morven, Ga., often receives equipment such as Chevrolet Tahoes that can be used as patrol cars. Police Chief Lynwood Yates said when he arrived 20 years ago, the department only had two cars.

"It's a way for a lot of smaller agencies to get equipment that they wouldn't be able to," he said. "For a department of our size, that's everything."

The Cato Institute, a public policy research organization, has been vocal about its opposition to the program.

"We believe civilian police officers should use the absolute minimum amount of force necessary," said Tim Lynch, director of the Institute's project on criminal justice. "The goal of the military is to find the enemy and destroy the enemy using maximum force. When you begin to blur the difference between the two ... what we find is a violation of constitutional rights and unnecessary injuries."